

When offenders receive sentences of Life Without Parole and long-term sentences as a result of the punitive responses to crime, one would anticipate an increase in the length of stay and an impact on the age of the prison population. The purpose of this briefing paper is to present information about older offenders, defined as age 50 and older, and to compare the older offender sentence lengths to offenders less than 50 (younger offenders) incarcerated in Washington State prisons. This will be done by analyzing data on admissions to prison, the prison population, and offenders releasing from prison.

**Table 1**

## ADMISSIONS TO PRISON

In both absolute numbers and percentages, the admissions of the older offender cohort have been increasing over the past eleven years. Table 1 illustrates that the average age of admissions during Fiscal Year 1993 was 30. The average age increased to 33 during Fiscal Year 2004. Admissions for this cohort increased from 3.4 percent of total admissions during Fiscal Year 1993 to 5.2 percent during Fiscal Year 2004, a 186 percent increase.

ADMISSIONS TO PRISON YOUNGER VERSUS OLDER OFFENDERS						
Fiscal Years	Total	Younger Offenders		Older Offenders		Average Age
		N	Percent	N	Percent	
1993	4,704	4,546	96.6	158	3.4	30
1998	6,203	5,943	95.8	260	4.2	31
2004	8,706	8,252	94.81	452	5.2	33

**Table 2**

OLDER OFFENDERS ADMITTED TO PRISON FISCAL YEAR AND CRIME TYPE						
Crime Types	1993		1998		2004	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Property	20	12.7	43	16.5	101	22.3
Drug	41	25.9	79	30.4	163	36.1
Person	24	15.2	65	25.0	116	25.7
Sex	73	46.2	73	28.1	72	15.9
Total	158	100	260	100	452	100

Displayed in Table 2 are the crime types committed by older offenders admitted to prison. The decrease in the percentage of sex crime admissions was evident over the past eleven years. The admissions of older offenders who committed a sex crime during Fiscal Year 1993 was approximately 46 percent, but drastically decreased during Fiscal Year 2004 to about 16 percent.

**Table 3**

## PRISON POPULATION

At the end of the Fiscal Year, June 30, 1993 (Table 3), 6.7 percent of the prison population consisted of older offenders. By June 30, 2004, the older offender population increased to 10.6 percent, a 161 percent increase with an average age of 36.

FISCAL YEAR END PRISON POPULATION YOUNGER VERSUS OLDER OFFENDERS						
Fiscal Years	Total	Younger Offenders		Older Offenders		Average Age
		N	Percent	N	Percent	
1993	10,287	9,603	93.4	684	6.7	33
1998	13,820	12,705	91.9	1115	8.1	34
2004	16,842	15,056	89.4	1,786	10.6	36

Table 4 displays the age distribution for the older offender prison population. As of June 30, 1993, the 50 to 54 offender cohort made up 50 percent of the older offender population. On June 30, 2004 that cohort increased to 55.2 percent. The under 60 offender cohort has been growing at a faster rate than the 60 and older cohort.

## Sentence Length

Chart 1 displays the sentence length imposed on offenders as of June 30, 2004. The chart indicates that 51 percent of younger offenders were sentenced to less than 5 years while only 26 percent of older offenders were sentenced to less than 5 years. Of the older offenders, 20 percent received a sentence of Life/Life Without Parole. In contrast, 6 percent of younger offenders were sentenced to Life/Life Without Parole.

Chart 1

### PRISON POPULATION OFFENDER AGE CATEGORY AND SENTENCE LENGTH AS OF JUNE 30, 2004

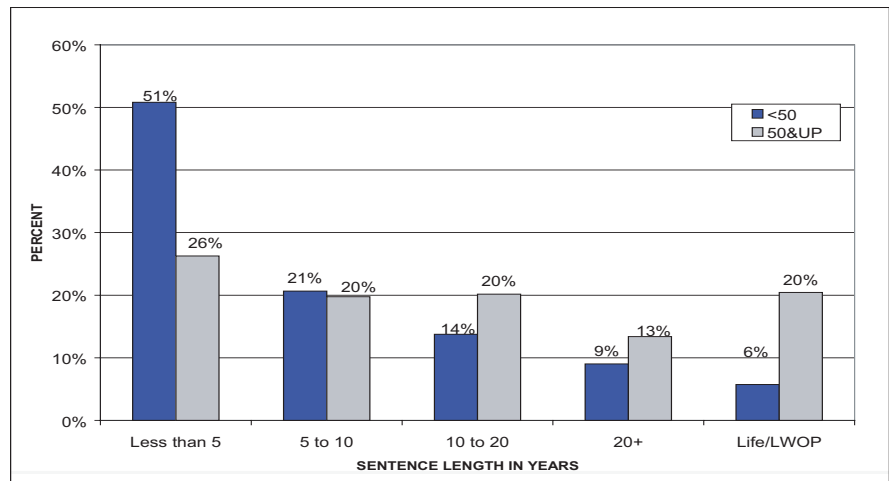
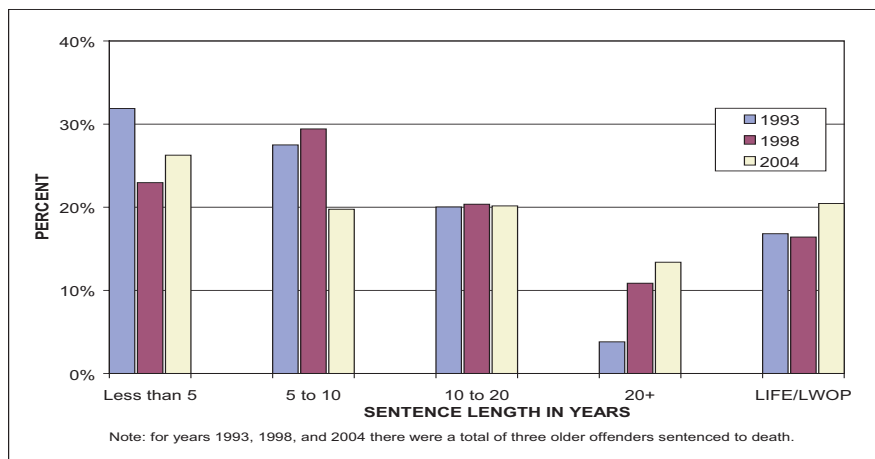


Chart 2

### OLDER OFFENDER SENTENCE LENGTH FOR END OF FISCAL YEARS 1993, 1998, 2004



Illustrated in Chart 2 is a notable increase in the sentence length for the older offender cohort. Of the older offender population, 16.8 percent had been sentenced to Life/Life Without Parole during end of Fiscal Year 1993, but by the end of Fiscal Year 2004, 20.4 percent of the older offender population had been sentenced to Life/ Life Without Parole. At the end of Fiscal Year 1993, 3.8 percent of the older offender population had been sentenced to 20 years or more, while at the end of Fiscal Year 2004 the percentage had increased to 13.4 percent.

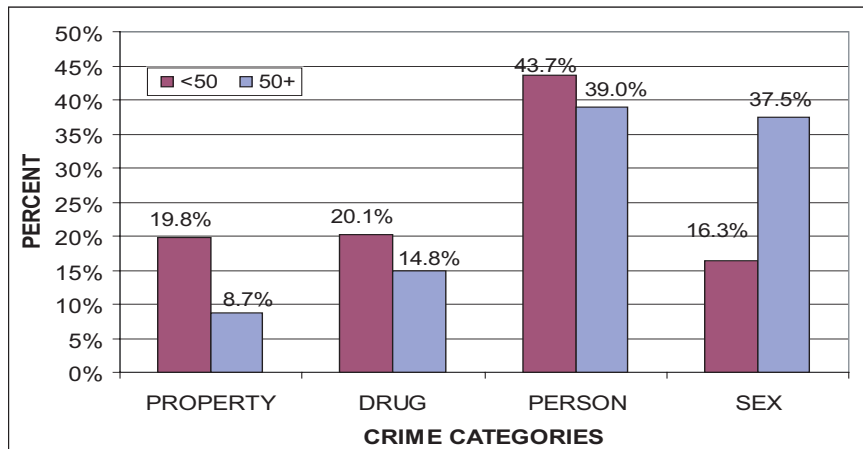
Table 4 displays the older offender prison population age distribution. As of June 30, 1993, the 50-54 offender cohort made up 50 percent of the older offender population. On June 30, 2004 that cohort increased to 55.2 percent. The under 60 offender cohort has been growing at a faster rate than the over 60 cohort.

Table 4

OLDER OFFENDER PRISON POPULATION AGE DISTRIBUTION						
Age Distribution	1993		1998		2004	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
50-54	342	2.6	627	3.5	985	4.5
55-59	155	1.5	228	1.7	420	2.4
60-64	97	0.9	140	1.0	206	1.2
65-69	49	0.5	70	0.5	104	0.6
70 & Up	41	0.4	50	0.4	71	0.4

**Chart 3**

**OFFENDER CRIME TYPES  
AS OF JUNE 30, 2004**



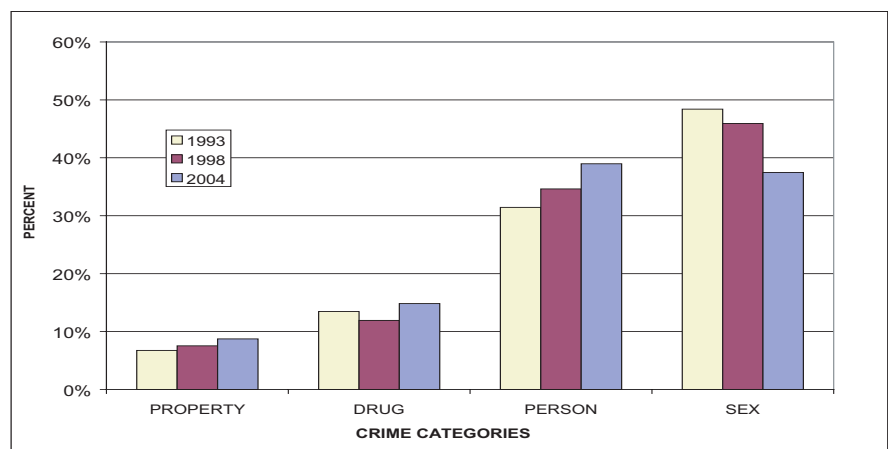
**Offense**

Chart 3 indicates that person crimes account for the majority of offender crimes, younger offenders 43.7 percent and older offenders 39 percent. Sex crimes made up 37.5 percent of older offenders' crimes, while only 16.3 percent of younger offenders' crimes were sex crimes. Property crimes account for 19.8 percent for younger offenders versus 8.7 percent of the crimes of older offenders.

**Chart 4**

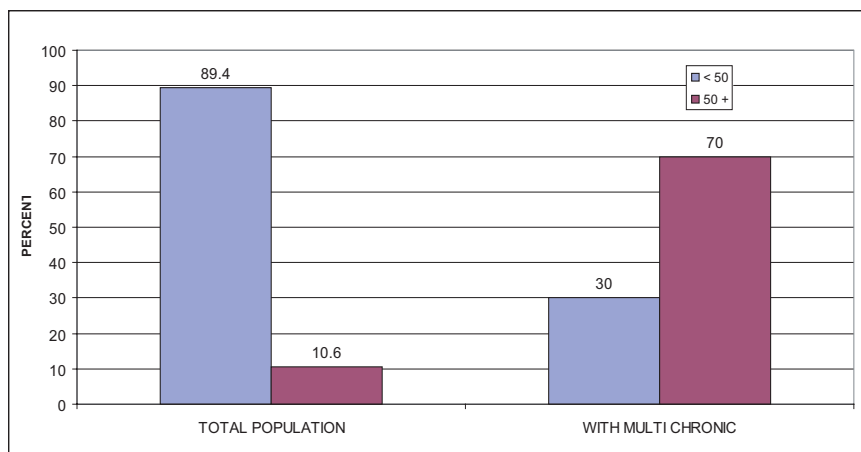
**OLDER OFFENDER CRIME TYPES  
FOR END OF FISCAL YEARS 1993, 1998, 2004**

Chart 4 shows that over the last eleven-year period, older offenders' crime distribution has changed. The percent of older offenders incarcerated for a sex crime has decreased since end of Fiscal Year 1993 while the proportion serving person crimes has increased.



**Chart 5**

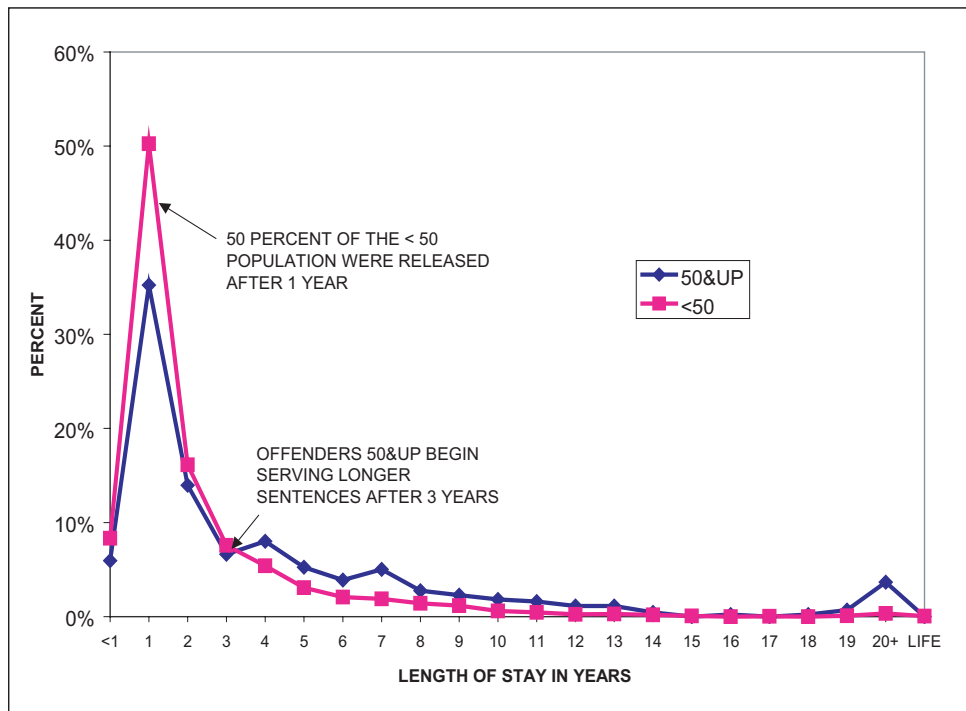
**OLDER OFFENDER HEALTH STATUS INDICATOR  
PERCENT OF OFFENDERS WITH MULTIPLE CHRONIC CONDITIONS  
COMPARED TO TOTAL POPULATION  
AS OF JUNE 30, 2004**



While older offenders now constitute 10.6 percent of the population, they use a disproportionately large amount of the inmate health care resources. In late 2004, they accounted for 16 percent of on-site medical visits and 25 percent of off-site medical trips. Older offenders had 48 percent of the admissions to community hospitals, which, in turn, accounted for 51 percent of overall hospital costs. Older offenders make up between 40 to 50 percent of the Department's patients with cardiac conditions, hypertension, diabetes and renal disorders. As shown in Chart 5, approximately 70 percent of offenders over 50 years of age have multiple chronic conditions.

Chart 6

# RELEASES FROM PRISON OFFENDER AGE CATEGORY AND LENGTH OF STAY FISCAL YEAR 2004



## RELEASES FROM PRISON

Chart 5 displays the actual time served in prison for offenders released during Fiscal Year 2004. This chart shows that older offenders serve, on average, longer periods of confinement in prison than younger offenders. Approximately half of released younger offenders have served a year or less, while only 35 percent of released older offenders served a year or less.

Although inmate deaths are not normally included in release statistics, it is of note that in Fiscal Year 2003, offenders 50 years and older accounted for 50 percent of inmate deaths.

## SUMMARY

As of June 1, 2004, Washington State prisons had 1,786 offenders who were fifty years and older. This cohort comprised 10.6 percent of the total prison population (N = 16,842), representing a notable increase from 6.7 percent in Fiscal Year end 1993. The data indicated that offenders are being admitted at older ages, as well as growing older in prison. The fifty and older offender cohort tends to commit more sex and person crimes and the length of stay is much longer than the younger offender cohort. Washington State prisons are now and will continue to have to face the complexities associated with the growth of the older offender population. In addition, the health care, costs associated with an aging population must be acknowledged.